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(*Arundinaceae*), and the rigid Horsetail (*Equisetum limosum*).

We strongly suspect that Dr. Richardson, has been making his experiment all this time on two different species of grass, one the true *Agrostis stolonifera*, at Portrush, a maritime grass, and predominant in salt marshes, while the county Armagh grass, is the *Agrostis vulgaris*, a plant universally spread over the whole country, in every soil and situation, but only valuable where it gets good nourishment.

The publication now before us may be of use to the readers of the Memoir, as tending to explain more fully the Doctor's Ideas; indeed the author who has declined to put his name to the work seems so well acquainted with every particular, that we have some

doubts whether it is not the Dr. himself. Be this as it may, we wish he had been more explicit relative to what it mentioned at page VIII. Does he wish us to believe that, the Memoir presented by the Literary Society is not the third edition? We can however only account for its publication, (as well as that of Mr. Gay Lussac's Journal, which had appeared so long before,)* by the extreme Modesty of the Members in appearing before the public. It is therefore not without pleasure we find that they have at last got over their diffidence, and given a Memoir at once original and instructive, to which we now gladly turn our attention.

*Tillock's Philosophical Magazine, Vol. 21, p. 220.

ANCIENT LITERATURE.

ON THE ROMAN HEROIC POETS.

(Translated from the French of La Harpe.)

THE works of Virgil are intelligible to a greater number of readers than those of Homer, because the knowledge of Latin is much more common than that of Greek. Virgil, in the original tongue, is early put into the hands of every student. Hence, the learned world have long decided on his merits and faults. Of the Eclogues and Georgics, this is not the place to speak; I shall here confine myself to some observations on the *Æneid*. The imperfection of this poem, and the perfection of the Georgics, are a proof of the immense difference which exists between the best didactic poem, and this great creation of the Epic. On turning from the study of Homer to that of Virgil, what strikes us most is, the veneration bestowed on the Greek by the Latin poet. Though we had never been told that Virgil was an adorer of Homer, to such a degree as to be named the Homeric (*Homericus*), the perusal of this work would suffice to convince us of it. He follows him step by step; but we know that thus to transfer the beauties of a foreign language, has always been considered as one of the triumphs of

genius; to judge of its difficulty we need only recal to mind the saying of Virgil that it would be easier to deprive Hercules of his club, than to take a line from Homer. He himself has, nevertheless, taken a considerable number; and in his translation, though he does not always equal, he sometimes surpasses his original*.

The first fault to be remarked in the *Æneid*, is, the character of the hero;

*No blame should be imputed to Virgil for translating Homer as he has done; Latin critics have condemned him with greater justice, for having borrowed from his own countrymen: that he has been guilty of plagiarism with respect to them, cannot be doubted, when we see the many quotations of lines borrowed by him, not only from Pacuvius, Ennius, Accius, and Sævius; but even from his most illustrious co-temporaries, such as Lucretius, Catullus, Varius and Furius. None of the works of the two last of these have come down to us. The former of them, however, is known to us by the eulogium bestowed on him by Horace, who speaks of him as having a talent peculiarly adapted, to heroic poetry.

—*Fortis epos acer*

Ut nemo Varius ducit.

None has exhibited bolder genius in heroic verse, than Varius.

and here we may see how much Lamotte and his party are mistaken, when they blame Homer for the moral imperfections of his hero, and how much better Aristotle judged, when he pointed out these imperfect characters in morality, as the best in poetry. It must be confessed, that not even the slightest fault can be attributed to Eneas; he is, from one end of the poem to the other, absolutely irreproachable; but

Virgil could not say, as Moliere did, when he made use of a good saying taken from a pitiful poet, "I seize on my property wherever I meet it." The greater part of these thefts of Virgil are hemistichs or even entire lines of singular beauty, some of which he has taken from the old poets during the times of the Punic wars, and in particular from Ennius: we also know that Virgil made no secret of it, since he boasted "that he extracted gold from the Dung-hill of Ennius." *Dunghill* let it be; we can believe, from his remaining fragments, that a false taste infected his style; and the more so because the language was not yet thoroughly refined; but the number of happy and truly poetical expressions with which he has supplied Virgil, prove that Ennius was possessed of the true spirit of poetry, and above all, with a feeling for imitative harmony, and fully justifies the species of veneration offered to him by the great Scipio, whose mind was too much enlightened not to admire in Ennius something more than the mere commemoration of his exploits.

Virgil did not conceal that he had followed Theocritus in his Eclogues and Hesiod in his Georgics; He himself makes this acknowledgment to these writers, even in the works in which he has left them, particularly Hesiod, far behind. But it is not so commonly known that the second book of the *Aeneid* so universally admired, is copied almost word for word, *pene ad verbum* (this is the expression of Macrobius) from a Greek poet called Pisander, who had written a collection of Mythological stories in verse. Macrobius speaks of the theft, as of a thing known to every one, even to children, and of Pisander as a poet of the first rank among the Greeks. There is every reason to believe him to be so, if the original of the taking of Troy be really his, and it is difficult to doubt of the fact after the assertion of Macrobius. In this case, the loss of the works of Pisander ought to be ranked among so many others which excite our useless regret.

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at the same time being never impassioned, he never inflames the reader, and the frigidity of his character spreads itself through the whole poem. He is almost always either in tears or at his prayers. He calmly suffers himself to be beloved by Dido, and as calmly quits her, at the Deity's command. This is very religious, but not at all dramatic, and Aristotle gives us to understand, that heroic poetry should be animated with the same passions as tragedy, when he says, that most of the rules which apply to the latter are also essential to the former. We may therefore conclude that this great principle of Aristotle has been fully confirmed by experience, since the two best chosen, and best conceived heroes of epic poetry among the ancients and the moderns, Achilles in the *Iliad*, and Rinaldo, in Jerusalem Delivered, are impassioned tragic characters. The latter of these is partly modelled on the former, he is equally brilliant, fierce, and impetuous. Such ought to be the heroes of poetry, such therefore, always bear off the palm. Eneas would not have succeeded better in the theatre than in the epic.

It is generally agreed that the proceedings of the first six books of the *Aeneid* are very nearly what they ought to be; unless we acknowledge, that after the great effect produced by the fourth book which contains the loves of Dido, the description of the Games with which the fifth is filled, however beautiful in itself, tends in some measure to check the reader's ardour; but he is well recompensed by the succeeding book, in which is the descent of Eneas to the infernal regions. But the plan of the last six books is generally condemned: here it is that we look for the greatest effect, in conformity to the rule, that all should increase as it advances; as Homer has so happily exemplified in the *Iliad*. It is here that Virgil unfortunately sinks below both himself and his model. The foundation of a state which was to be the cradle of Rome; a young princess whom a stranger, announced by the oracle, claims from her betrothed husband; the different nations of Italy siding with either of the rivals; all seemed to promise action, emotion, circumstances and interest. Yet, instead of all we have a right to expect on such odd

a subject, what do we find? A king Latinus who is not master in his own kingdom, and seems to have no will of his own; who, after having given the Trojans a hospitable reception, suffers his Queen Amata and Turnus to make war on them; while he avoids any interference by shutting himself up in this palace. One Lavinia who is scarcely mentioned, a nominal mute character; although it is on her account that the war is undertaken. The Queen, after the defeat of the Latins, hangs herself on a beam in the palace; and Turnus is at length killed by Eneas, while we feel it impossible to be warmly interested either in the victory of the one or the defeat of the other. Such is the subject of the last six books; it follows that in invention, characters and arrangement, the imitator of Homer is left far behind.

As to his battles, he merely abridges and contracts those of Homer, whom he translates in every part. He has less expansion, yet less fire. He moreover suffers under a striking disadvantage, arising from the very nature of the subject. The war of Troy was so memorable an event in the history of the world, of which it still makes one of the principal epochs, that all those who distinguished themselves in it, occupied a place in the memory of men. They were names consecrated by fame, in every body's mouth, and, as it were familiar to the imagination. Nothing is so favourable to a poet as names which interest of themselves, and this interest is partly extended to the first six books of the *Æneid*, where we again meet with the actions and names already immortalized by Homer. But from the commencement of the seventh book, Virgil leads us into a new world, and introduces us to characters totally unknown, with whom, according to the plan he has adopted, we have few opportunities of becoming acquainted. We may thence perceive that there is much difference, in bringing on the stage Ajax, Hector, Ulysses, and Diomedes, instead of Messapus, Ufens, Tarchon, and Mezentius. It is well known that Virgil wished to flatter both the Romans and Augustus, the former by the fable of their descent from the Trojans; the latter by the double

relation which he establishes between Augustus and Eneas, as founders of empires and legislators. But it is no less true, that Homer, in recording the siege of Troy, has chosen the most celebrated subject then known in the world; and that Virgil, wishing to celebrate the origin of Rome, as he declares in the first verse of the *Æneid*, is obliged to plunge into the antiquities of Italy, which were as obscure as those of Greece were famous. It is evident that Virgil must lose by the contrast; the heroes of Homer are the heroes of all nations, of all theatres; we are accustomed to view them on the stage with the deities, to whom they do not appear inferior by the comparison. The battles of the *Iliad* exhibit the grandest spectacle, we imagine we see Europe and Asia engaged; those of the *Æneid*, on the contrary, seem to be the skirmishes of some obscure tribes. Virgil has endeavoured to excite our interest for the young Pallas, the son of Evander; for Lausus, the son of Mezentius, and for Camilla, queen of the Volscians. But an interest, transient as it is and purely epical, directed towards characters whom we see but for a moment, cannot supply the place of that general interest which ought to animate the whole machine of the heroic poem.

Such is the decision which the rigid justice of posterity has formed on the failings of the *Æneid*; yet, in spite of all his faults, the remaining merits of Virgil are sufficient to entitle him to the name of prince of latin poets, which he has received from his own age, and to the admiration bestowed on him by posterity. The second, fourth and sixth books are three grand pieces, universally considered as the most beautiful and completely finished specimens of heroic poetry that any nation has been able to produce. That of Dido in particular is solely the author's; he had no model; and it is, in this respect, singular among all the relics of antiquity. These three admirable books, the episode of Nisus and Euryalus, that of Cacus, that of the funeral of Pallas, and that of Eneas' shield are master-pieces of the art of painting in verse. What completes the character of Virgil, is his constant perfection of style, which is such that it seems impossible for man to go beyond it. It is at once the admi-

ration and the despair of all who cultivate poetry. If, therefore, he has not equalled Homer in invention and richness of thought, he has surpassed him in the beauty of particular parts, and in the exquisite taste displayed in all his details. Let us not, therefore, regret that nature has not lavished all her gifts upon one; let us rather admire the astonishing variety of her gifts, the inexhaustible abundance which always promises new food for genius, new titles to glory, and new sources of enjoyment to mankind.

Silius Italicus, who was consul the year of Nero's death, and died in the reign of Trajan, has imitated Virgil, as Duché and Lafosse have imitated Racine. We have not an epic but an historical poem of his, in sixteen books, the subject of which is the second Carthaginian war. He scrupulously adheres to the order and detail of the facts from the siege of Saguntum to the defeat of Hannibal, and the subjection of Carthage. He moreover exhibits neither invention nor fable; unless it be that he sometimes introduces Juno with her ancient hatred of the descendants of Eneas, and her ancient love of Carthage. But as this produces nothing but some unnecessary speeches, the whole is nothing more than a gazette in verse. The diction is thought to be pure, but it is weak and humble. His admirers can point out but a few lines worthy of remembrance, and even of these the most beautiful are borrowed from the prose of Livy. Silius possessed one of Cicero's country seats, and another near Naples, in which was Virgil's tomb; the procuring of these was not so difficult as the imitation of either of those great men.

The title of Statius's *Thebaid*, a poem, in twelve books, the subject of which is the quarrel of Eteocles and Polynices, which terminates in the death of both, announces an unhappy choice of a subject. What interest can be excited by two wretches, subjected to their father's curse, and accomplishing by their crimes and mutual slaughter, the malediction which they have so well deserved? Statius, by his bombast, monotony, and bad taste is much more tiresome and disagreeable than Silius Italicus, though he possesses more spirit, and displays some sparks of genius. The best part of his book is the

battle of the two brothers, with the circumstances which precede and follow it, which form the subject of the eleventh book. For though the author does not change his natural style of strained declamation, he has some traits of strength and beauty. Statius, notwithstanding, enjoyed a high reputation during his lifetime. Martial informs us that all Rome was in motion to hear him, whenever (according to the custom of those days) he recited his verses in public: and that the reading of the *Thebaid* was a feast to the Romans. This would suffice to prove the corrupt taste of that age. He lived under Domitian. At the conclusion he addresses his muse, warning her not to aim at rivalling the *Divine Æneid*, but to *follow it at a distance, and to adore its traces*. His muse has punctually obeyed him. He does not fail to promise himself immortality, and to reckon on the honours which will be bestowed on him by posterity. It would have been better to have confined himself to the applauses of his own age than to have appealed to ours. It is true, his poem has descended to us: time, which has destroyed so many of the writings of Livy, Tacitus, Sophocles, and Euripides, has respected the *Thebaid* of Statius. Thus, during a long series of ages of ignorance, chance has drawn from the dust worthless writings, while it covers, and will perhaps forever cover the masterpieces of antiquity. Yet, this is not the immortality held forth by the muses; of what consequence is it, that it is proclaimed through all ages that Statius is a bad poet. His writings are known only to a few men of learning, who wish to form a just idea of all that has been transmitted to us from the antients.

We may say the same of the declaimer Claudian, who lived under the sons of Theodosius. He has composed some satirical or heroical poems, whose harmony resembles that of a clock, always striking the same chimes. Some of his verses are still quoted; among others the beginning of his poem against Rufinus. But in general, he is one of those inflated versifiers, who, though they always make use of sounding words, never fail of being tiresome. A judgment of his style may be formed from the beginning of his poem on the Rape of Proserpine.